Computer recycling hot topic in South Carolina

As national discussions continue on the future of electronics recycling, several entrepreneurs are making a difference in South Carolina. And passage of market development legislation in 2004 may help spur further activity in the recovery and processing of used computers and electronics. Here is a brief overview of some of South Carolina's electronics recycling activities. Mention of a particular company should not be construed as and endorsement or advertisement nor is this information all inclusive. Additional qualified vendors exist and may provide services in South Carolina.

Cleanlites Recycling in Spartanburg accepts old electronics, also known as e-waste, from companies throughout the Southeast. Dennis Olsen with Cleanlites said that he has seen increased interest among businesses for recycling monitors and computer equipment. Given that increased activity, Cleanlites will begin demanufacturing computer equipment at its 15,000 square-foot processing facility this fall instead of shipping it to a sister plant located in Michigan.

Nxtcycle, an Arizona-based electronics recycler, has been looking at locating a possible staging warehouse operation in the Upstate to service companies and communities along the Atlanta-Charlotte corridor. According to Bill Wilhelm, Nxtcycle's Southeast sales representative, Nxtcycle provides services for manufacturers, retailers, consumers and communities through an integrated approach that includes reuse, component recycling and commodity recovery. With the growing number of televisions and computers being generated through ongoing technical improvements and the switch to more plasma screens, high-definition televisions and laptops, proper electronic waste management is critical to protecting the state's environment.

Irmo e-waste event successful

About 150 residents dropped off almost nine tons of old computers, monitors and peripherals, fax machines, copiers and televisions for recycling at an electronics collection event held in April.

The collection event was sponsored by the Carolina Recycling Association's Midlands Networking Council and was part of Irmo's Earth Day activities.

Earth Protection Services, Inc. (EPSI) was the vendor. EPSI recently opened a mercury lamp processing facility in Williamston. In addition to recycling fluorescent bulbs and other mercury-containing lamps, EPSI also takes old computers and outdated electronics and sends them to a sister plant in Arizona for processing.

In addition to providing Midlands residents an opportunity to recycle rather than dispose of their household electronics, the event also let residents know about proposed legislation to establish an electronics recycling program in South Carolina. The proposed law would charge a $5 advanced recycling fee on new cathode ray tube (CRT) monitors and televisions. Funds generated would support grants to local governments to develop a recycling infrastructure for all discarded electronics, public education programs on electronics recycling and loans to recycling businesses advancing new technologies for safer products or recycling options.

The Recycling Market Development Advisory Council and Senator Phil Leventis (D-Sumter) met with a representative from Hewlett-Packard to discuss the proposed legislation. A concern for retailers like Hewlett-Packard is the inability to recover fees from sales over the Internet. Further discussions are planned with the S.C. Department of Revenue to address this concern.

Charleston County honored

Charleston County, which maintains the state's only permanent e-waste collection service that provides drop-off collection sites throughout the county, was recently recognized by the National Association of Counties.

The Charleston County Council and Solid Waste Department has developed a program that increases awareness about the potential hazards of improper disposal of e-waste while making it convenient for

residents to bring discarded electronics to collection sites throughout the county for recycling. Charleston County began the process by offering three special electronics collection events. The first event, "Trim Your Waste Day," was held on January 5, 2002, and residents brought e-waste along with Christmas trees, household hazardous waste and corrugated cardboard to convenience centers as part of this post-holiday clean-up. Funded by a solid waste grant from the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, more than 12.5 tons of e-waste were recovered.

A second event was held in August 2002 and concentrated solely on electronics. About six tons of e-waste were collected. And finally, a kick-off for its permanent collection center at the Bees Ferry Landfill was held on January 4, 2003, and about 11 tons of e-waste were collected. The county has e-waste drop boxes located at seven of its collection sites and electronics are picked up routinely for delivery to the Bees Ferry location for final storage and collection by Recycle America.

Keys to success include on-going public education and proper funding. The county conducted a multi-media awareness effort to promote the program and received extensive media coverage from broadcast and print media resulting in high participation from more than 309,000 residents. In addition to receiving a solid waste grant for the initial equipment and set-up of the e-waste program, on-going funding for solid waste activities comes from the Charleston County User Fee.

Brothers take different approaches

Al and Steve Strickland share more than a brotherly bond – they both are involved in the computer recycling business. But there are some differences in how they do business.

Al owns CompuWorks in Columbia and his primary focus is purchasing surplus computer equipment and reselling it. Steve's business, Carolina Electronic Recycling located in North, focuses on scrapping old computers and peripherals and selling the various components including glass, plastics, scrap metal and copper. Both have been involved in computer recycling for years.

Non-profit helps refurbish computers

Simputer USA is a Charlotte-based non-profit organization that's mission is two-fold: helping economically disadvantaged youth have access to computers and providing job training for individuals seeking a career in information technology. Simputer collects old computers and cell phones from businesses and individuals in North and South Carolina and refurbishes them using student interns working toward information technology certification. Once the computers have been repaired and upgraded, Simputer makes them available to schools, special needs students and low-income families.

According to Simputer's president Roger Deora, it's a win-win-win situation. "We provide free equipment to needy individuals so they are able to access information technology," Deora said. "We help provide valuable job skills for people entering the work force. And we are a source for businesses and individuals to recycle unwanted computers, peripherals and software while receiving a tax credit."

For more information about electronics recycling, please contact Ted Campbell at **(803) 737-0477** or Karen Owens at **(803) 737-0239** with the Recycling Market Development Advisory Council within the S.C. Department of Commerce.

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